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ABSTRACT

In this presentation the author paints a conceptual portrait of his evolving relationships to his formal studies and thereby describes a method by which educators can reconceptualize the meaning of curriculum. By taking oneself and one's existential experience as a data source and using the psychoanalytical technique of free association, one can build not only a linear but a multidimensional biography based on conceptual and preconceptual experiences. The method consists of four steps. the regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. In the regressive step, one postulates and records one's educational experiences in the future. In the analytical stage, one describes one's present educational experience and then seeks the individuality and interrelationships of the three descriptions. In the synthetical stage, one attempts to extract the existential meaning of the present and integrate the three forms of intellectualization into a comprehensive whole that includes the physical self. The method reduces the distance between the researcher and subject by making the researcher the subject and allows for deeper and clearer understanding of the present by outlining the past, present, and future. (Author/DE)

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THE METHOD OF CURRERE

by

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THE METHOD OF CURRERE

1.

It is regressive -- progressive -- analytical -- synthetical. It is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that is trans-temporal and trans-conceptual. From another perspective, the method is the self-conscious conceptualization of the temporal, and from another, it is the viewing of what is conceptualized through time. So it is that we hope to explore the complex relation between the temporal and the conceptual. In doing so we disclose their relation to the Self in its evolution and education.

2.

Before I discuss the method more concretely, permit me to sketch an outline of what it is I am after.

I want to try to understand the contribution my formal studies make to my understanding of my biography. I am taking as hypothesis that I am in a biographic situation, and while in certain ways I have chosen it (and hence must bear the responsibility for it), in other ways I can see that it follows in causal ways from previous situations. I can look at my life in a linear way, acknowledging its actual multi-dimensional character, but limiting my view to a linear one, to make it more manageable, and I see that this has led to that; in that circumstance I chose that, I rejected this alternative; I affiliated with those people, then left them for these, that this field intrigued me intellectually, then that one, I worked on this problem, then that one. And if I chart these choices and circumstances on a time line, and then begin to describe (as I remember it now), the transitions from that situation to the one that followed, I see that there is a coherence. Not necessarily a logical one, but a lived one, a felt one. The point of coherence is the biography as it is lived. The Lebenswelt.

I mark the present on this chart. I am studying this now. I am taking interest in this problem now. I am affiliated with these people now, but I can see that I am -- is it drawn? -- to those.

Why? What role in this biography do these evolving intellectual interests play? In what way do they contribute to an understanding of the dominant themes of this biography. In what ways have they permitted biographic movement, that is, freed one from interests whose life has gone out of them, and drawn one on into areas that excite? What is the relation of these interests and concomitant professional activities to one's private life? I must have no submerged value here; I must be willing to objectively describe the relation between my professional work and my personal work, not succumbing to popular attitudes, whether these insist the two must be connected or must remain separate.

There are many related questions, but the predominant one is: what has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?

By taking as a hypothesis that I do not know the answer to this question, I take myself and my existential experience as a data source. The method of data generation is the psycho-analytical technique of free association. I take a particular question, like why am I involved in the research project I am involved in? and I record, by pen or recorder, all that occurs to me, regardless how esoteric and hence unrelated the information apparently is. But I get ahead of myself.

My hunch is that by working in the manner I will describe, I will obtain information that will move me biographically, and not only linearly, but multi-dimensionally. If I take my current perspective, and try to put parentheses around it (so to speak) by recording it, then I have moved to another vantage point. I have found this to be so. If I write about my biographic situation as I see it (not as I want to see it, although this can be included) then it is as if I have escaped from it. It is there, on the paper in a way, and I am still here, at the typewriter, looking at the print and the conceptualization of the perspective that was mine, and so the place is new, I have, in Sartre's language, totalized my situation, and the new sum is where I conceptually and (more inclusively) ontologically am now. (This biographic study distills the complex ~~existenological~~ epistemological processes which make possible the creation and recreation of the disciplines.) Because the view is new, the old problem (say it is a research problem, like, how primary age children learn certain

arithmetical concepts) is seen differently. But because the problem is inherently a partial product of my conceptual appartus, and because this appartus functions slightly differently since its operator has moved slightly, the problem itself poses itself differently, and hence the problem is different.

We use an analogous strategy all the time often without thinking about it. If something stumps us, we back off (we say) to do something else, then come at it again later. I am willing to guess that we do this, that is, we allow time to pass before we attempt to reconceptualize the problem, because we must move onto another ontological level, from where the problem looks differently and hence is different, and the solution may then become clear. We left the problem initially because we could not solve it on the conceptual level where we were.

My hunch is that formal studies, like literary study, or the study of physics, as well as resulting in the acquisition of knowledge of these areas, can be utilized to illuminate the myriad of surface ways, and perhaps the not innumerable number of subliminal ways, we evolve through time and (and as a subset of this set, so to speak) how our intellectual interests evolve through time. At this point in my study it seems fruitful and important to keep the primary focus biographic, and the intellectual or conceptual secondary or at least subservient, even if the conceptual is one's mode d'être fundamentally. (That is, one thinks through one's life, one's life is determined by one's thoughts, rather than living through one's life and thinking about that life. Obviously I have dichtomized what is probably more dialectical in nature).

Although if we slip another level, I think we see (and take seriously the phenomenologist's assertion) that all conceptualization is a manifestation of a pre-conceptual subsratum. Thus far, in my studies, however, I have found the relation between pre-conceptual and conceptual to be dialectical, a sort of middle-ground between a view that is "I think therefore I am" and the phenomenological "I am therefore I think." I do tend to see the Cartesian view as biographically explicable (although not reducible), that is, the statement and the resultant mind-body dichotomy is consequent of an over-identification with the ideational. Even the

grammatical structure of Descartes' sentence belies the equivalence: "I" think, I am not only thinking; it is I who thinks but I am not my thoughts, I am more than they; I am this body sitting in this chair, my stomach is full, there is coffee taste in my mouth, and at the same time thoughts are in my head, and they achieve a reality of more power as I attend to them, give my attention to them, identify with them and grant them reality. But on the other level I see that my thoughts are like bubbles from the bottom of a pond, and I am on the surface; and they express, to use a psychological analogue of Chomsky's concept, the deep structure of my being. Thus the partial validity of psychoanalytical theory, the image of the iceberg, and the potential profit of interpreting, (at times it is only speculation) what is seen in terms of what is not. This epistemological view, very simply stated above, makes me an artist. I experience, and I attempt to express in publicly communicable language, what it is I experience. The preconceptual antedates, temporally and structurally (that is, it is a different order of experience) the conceptual, whether this conceptual takes poetic form, or the form of a theoretical paper to be read at A.E.R.A.

Yet, as I said earlier, from my present position, I tend to see the relation between conceptual and pre-conceptual as dialectical. There are times when my experience is misleading, for example. An obvious illustration involves the psychoanalytical concept of "transference". I see you, but my vision is veiled (transparently so I cannot see it readily) and I see you partly as if you were someone else, to whom I have some unresolved and (ordinarily) complex emotional attachment (often of a negative sort, but possibly of a positive nature). So I respond to you with emotion that (if I am remaining faithful to the concrete present and to the rational mode of minding), I can <u>know</u> is illogical and unfounded, given the history of our relationship. I know rationally that this emotion I experience when I meet you does not properly belong to our meeting, and so I can choose to hold it in abeyance (although the effectiveness of this choice depends largely on the power of the emotion and the power of my rational mode. This is frequent in human meetings I suspect. The British psychiatrist David Cooper has written "The boundaries between a transference relationship and a real one are almost never clear".) In this brief,

overly simple example, I show that on some occasions I allow, in fact, desire my conceptual realm to give form and content to the pre-conceptual, and in this case, to that dimension of the pre-conceptual that we commonly characterize as the "affective". If I were rigidly faithful to the pre-conceptual, I should make mistakes (and unfair ones at that) in my affiliations with others, and so on occasion the conceptual takes precedence over the pre-conceptual. (Again, it certainly occurs to me that there are other levels, let us say -- in a consciously metaphoric way -- higher than where I am now from which this dialectical relation is actually a unity, with the pre-conceptual the antecedent. Part of the obligation of the investigator of currere, however, is to speak from where he lives, making clear this biographic basis.)

Writing from a biographic basis would capture (at least try to) the complex inter-play between the two dimensions of human being, but to do so, as I mentioned earlier, requires taking on as it were, the role of the artist and the epistemological posture of the phenomenologist. You see the task here is description. I want to paint a conceptual portrait of how it is I live now, and this includes the delicate balance or imbalance of the two realms. But to do so (I am persuaded at this time) involves loosening one's identification with the conceptual, because, at least as far as I can see, intellectuals and academics tend to be Cartesians. We think through our work, and through our lives, and our lives, I am nearly willing to guess, are more clearly ideas to us than ontological realities. That is, we live in our ideas of what is occurring rather than what is ontologically occurring, of which our ideas, are only one part.

If this is the case, then it will be necessary to loosen this identification with the ideational. I am not certain this can be done with what I am calling the method of currere. You see, I am what I think is called a spoilt sample. I have sat zazen, the Zen Buddhist meditation, and three other forms of meditation, for several years, and part of what this practice is after is a loosening of the attachment with the cognitive, and the establishment of (although a Zen master would probably see it as a return to) a transcendental perspective, one that is independent

of the mind, the body, the emotions, and of all the subtler more difficult to categorize realms of human experience. As this has begun to occur in me, it h s occurred in regard to my studies. These papers I have been writing on "method" are my attempt to paint a conceptual portrait of my evolving relationships to my formal studies, and relatedly my views of how we educators can reconceptualize the meaning of curriculum.

What is then to follow are my suggestions to those who wish to experiment with this sort of study. Modifications are welcomed as you work. The experimental attitude we associate with the basic idea of science is imperative. If what you attempt brings no results, then alter the procedure I will suggest. We must be utilitarians.

3.

Regressive. The first step of the method is the regressive. One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present. Let me illustrate.

Listening to this paper being read one can be said to be absorbed in the present. But as soon as we have said that seemingly simple statement, we slip into complexity. In which present is one absorbed? Is it the concrete, literal present? That is, is one attending to the sight and sound of Pinar reading, of seated in a certain chair in a certain room, amid others? Or is the present where one dwells what we can call an abstract, conceptual present? Perhaps it is the conceptual reality created by the words that I read, perhaps it is a more private one, and thoughts, your own thoughts "what is this about?" or "who is it I'm to have lunch with today?" or "I must remember to phone home before too late tonight". A survey would probably reveal that the majority dwell in the conceptual present (rather than the concrete present), maybe mine (as I read), probably yours (your ideas of what it is I'm saying, your plans for the next day or so).

My hypothesis is that to the extent one dwells in a conceptual present, and in the subjective present, is the extent to which one dwells in the past. Not just the literal past, as the memory of arrival last night, which like the literal present often is, superficially apparent, and just as superficially important.

The biographic past? It is usually ignored. Ignored but not absent. The biographic past exists presently, complexly contributive to the biographic present. While we say it cannot be held accountable for the present, the extent to which it is ignored is probably the extent it does account for what is present.

Unconsciousness perpetuates itself. Hence the formation of habit, of habitual responses to seemingly characteristic stimuli, responses that are to varying degrees (we say) adjustive, or not. The habitual is the surface is the public, the outer, and and its strength or the force of habit, is positively correlated with unconsciousness and capture by the past. The present then becomes acting out of the past, the superimposition of past issues and situations and persons onto the present. The complex of habitual responses is constitutive of the present personality. Its predictability is its habituality is its unconsciousness is its pastness.

In all likelihood one is in the past while in the present. The present is then veiled; the past is manifest and apparent, however, so transparently present that it is veiled, and one assumes oneself to be in the present when one is not. To ascertain where one is, when one is, one must locate the past. Location means identification means bracketing the past. Bracketing means looking at what is not ordinarily seen, at what is taken-for-granted, hence loosening oneself from it. As the past becomes present, the present is revealed. So it is we aim at freedom from the past, freedom in the present. Such objectives require entrance into the past as a first step.

One must regress. Not in the popularized psycho-analytical sense of losing one's hard-won maturity, and becoming infantile. Nor not necessarily involving dramatic and painful character de-crystallization, as in the Janovian approach to psycho-therapy. (Although it is true that as one leaves the present to enter the past one detaches from one's acculturated character. This detachment is sufficiently subtle as to escape notice, but it does initiate a gradual process of de-crystallization and accompanying disclosure of a non-static, non-arrested character always in transition.)

Re---- back. Gradi --- to go back. One goes back, and there one finds the past intact. The past is entered, lived in, but not necessarily succumbed to. Because one is not there concretely one is not necessarily vulnerable. One avoids complete identification with the self that was, and hence is able to observe.

This is the object of this part of the method: to observe oneself functioning in the past. Since the focus of the method is educational experience, one takes special notice of one's past life-in-schools, with one's past life-with schoolteachers and one's past life-with-books and other school-related artifacts. Observe and record. Include present responses to what is observed.

It is suggested that one return to the schooled beginning, to the elementary years, to whenever one is able to reach. Enter again the classroom, watch the teachers, yourself and your classmates, what you did. More importantly, how you did it. From the start did your attention adhere to the public program? To what extent did you absent yourself in fantasy? Did these absences coincide with particular lessons (like geography) and with particular teachers?

Do not attempt to interpret what you observe at this point. Interpretation will interrupt your presence in the past.

On through the primary grades into junior and senior high school, keeping the observer's focus on the self. The self, in this classroom, with that teacher, these subjects, this response to that teacher, the intervention of parents regarding that situation, and one's response. One's attachment to these subjects, to those teachers; one's disinterest in that field, one's dislike of this teacher.

Athletic interests if any and their effects upon one's studies. Erotic interests as they impinged upon one's studies. The importance of public conceptions of status. This college or that? The self amidst it all, evolving this way, leaving those friends, taking on these, have these academic interests, then those.

Through the undergraduate years. These courses, those professors. These friends. What sequence?

Autumn. Winter. Spring.

Summer jobs. Building houses in the suburbs, reading Bertrand Russell during lunch breaks. What was on the subject's mind those months? What mood, not visible then, kept him encapsulated, blurring his view?

School again in the fall. Taking these courses. Studying in the library, trying to in the dormitory. This girl, that friend, the war, anger, hatred, becoming awake, rather thinking oneself awake and knowing but neither awake nor knowing, always thinking, one's physical body absent, mostly.

The major subject chosen. Onto graduate school. Graduation and an academic position. Attending professional meetings. The present moment.

The subject's life, specifically his educational life, at least his life in schools (the disentangling of those terms to come later). It exists still; one re-enters it, one goes back; one regresses; it is there, present. Recording it via words on pages; conceptualizing it.

Bringing the past to the present by printing it. The words coalesce to form a photograph. Holding the photograph in front of oneself, one studies the detail, the literal holding of the picture and one's response to it suggestive of the relation of past to present.

Record this response to the gestalt that is the biographic past recorded. This response to the regression forms part of a second photograph to be completed later, the present. With the response to the progression and an independent description of the present, a picture of the present will present itself.

Thus we conclude the first step of the procedure, the regression to the past and the return to the present.

4.

Progressive. Progressive derives from pro meaning 'before' and gradi meaning 'to step, go'. In this step we look the other way. We look, in Sartre's language, at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present. We have found that the future is present in the same sense that the past is present. It influences, in complicated ways, the present; it forms the present.

Sit alone, perhaps in a slightly darkened room, in a comfortable chair with a writing table and a pen. Close the eyes, place the attention on the breathing. Take a few slow deep breaths as these are comfortable. The point of these minutes is relaxation. After one is relaxed (if the subject has employed any of currently-available meditative techniques, s/he knows the desirable state), one thinks of the future, of tomorrow, of next week, of the next few months, of the next academic year, of the next three years and so on. Since our interest is what we are calling educational experience, gently bring the attention back to matters associated with your intellectual interests, your career, and allow your mind to work free associatively. Record what comes. Try to discern where your intellectual interests are going, the relation between these evolving interests and your private life, between these two and evolving historical conditions. Perhaps you will begin to see something of the interdependent nature of your interests and the historical situation. If a teacher, focus on your teaching, on your relationship to students and to colleagues, especially on the emotional content of these, and on the intellectual content. Discern where these appear to be going. You might imagine a future, perhaps a year hence or perhaps several years hence; describe it. (It is important to free associate, and to avoid use of the rational, critical aspect. Don't for example conclude that an imagined futuristic state is unreasonable. At this stage allow usually buried visions of what is not yet present manifest.)

Do this for as long as it is comfortable; do not force the process; strain distorts the data.

Return to the chair and the dwelling in future states several times on different days over a period of several days or weeks or months. Such elongation of the experiment reduces the possibility of distortion by temporary emotive or cognitive pre-occupations. Thus increased is the likelihood that the photographs taken are reflective of more lasting anticipations.

This completes the progression.

Analytical. One takes both photographs, and sets them aside. What is left? Describe the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them.

For many the present, however idiosyncratically, is woven into the fabric of institutional life. Within that historical context, embodied concretely in the building which houses your office and those beings who are your colleagues and students, what is your present? What are one's intellectual interests? What is one's emotional condition?

To what ideas, what fields of study, is one drawn? From what is one repelled? List these. Describe not interpret these attractions. Photograph the present as if one were a camera, including oneself in the present taking the photograph, and your response to this act.

Description via conceptualization is breaking into parts the organic whole. Ana --- up, throughout. Lysis --- a loosing. Conceptualization is detachment from experience. Bracketing what is, what was, what can be, one is loosened from it, potentially more free of it, hence more free to freely choose the present, and future.

Study the three photographs. What are they; what is their individuality? What fundamental ontological theme do they express? Why are they as they are?

In this part of the analysis, one may profitably utilize non-educationist interpretative systems to generate data. For example, psycho-analytical and neo-psycho-analytical systems, gestalt systems, politically and sociologically focused systems can be put on as if eyeglasses, and looked through. Note the view visible through these lens. Once taken off, look at these interpretations. How plausible? How complete? What clearer light do they focus on the present?

Interpretative schema must make more visible what is lived through without them. They must not subordinate the lived present to their abstract 'selves'. They, the entire conceptual realm of which they are parts, are constitutent

elements of the present, like the brain a part of the body, not the body a part of the brain. Analogously the biographic present is not part of a conceptual system, but the system an aspect of the present.

Juxtapose the three photographs: past, present, future. What are their complex, multi-dimensional inter-relations? How is the future present in the past, the past in the future, and the present in both?

6.

Synthetical. Syn --- together + tithenai --- to place.

Put them aside.

Then look at oneself concretely, as if in a mirror. Attention on the breath, to underscore the concreteness of being.

Who is that?

In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present?

What is the contribution of my scholarly and professional work to my present? Do they illumine the present situation? Obscure it?

Are one's intellectual interests biographically liberative, that is, do they permit, in fact encourage, ontological movement?

Do they point toward increased conceptual sophistication and refinement, to deeper knowledge and understanding, of both one's chosen field of study and of that fields' symbolic relation to one's evolving biography? Do they, as Trilling suggests, move one to enter new, higher levels of being?

What conceptual gestalt is finally visible? Can one bracket and thus escape from the conceptual, take it into one's hands as it were, examine it, and then see its relation to one's psychological, physical, ontological condition? See its relation to (to use Wittgenstein's phrase) "one's form of life"? This includes one's public and private, internal life, one's externally discernable behavior and the contents of one's stream-of-consciousness.

Make it all of a whole. It, all of it -- intellections, emotions, behavior -- occurs in and through the physical body. As the body is a concrete whole, so what occurs within and through the body can become a discernible whole, integrated in its meaningfulness.

The physical body is the concrete manifestation of all that occurs in and through it.

The Self is available to itself in physical form. The intellect, residing in the physical form, is part of the Self. Thus the Self is not a concept the intellect has of itself. The intellect is thus an appendage of the Self, a medium, like the body, through which the Self, the world are accessible to themselves. No longer am I completely identified with my mind. My mind is identified as a part of me. (Descartes is thus corrected.)

Mind in its place, I conceptualize the present situation.

I am placed together.

Synthesis.

Note

The method attempts to reduce the distance between the researcher and his subject. This is not reduction of spatial distance, but of role distance. This reduction lessens I think the likelihood of super-imposing on our subjects our ideas of what is they are doing. The matter of understanding the relation between pre-conceptual and conceptual reality is crucial. By moving in the past, one observes how the conceptual is only a part, however integral a part, of the biographic situation. One can observe how one places upon reality one's ideas, and how, with ~~one's idea~~ currere, one can allow reality to release its own ideas.

The distance I have mentioned between the researcher and the subject: it is reduced because in this method the researcher leaves his laboratory and enters himself. He takes on the subject's role, and performs experiments on himself, experiments which have as their aims wider awareness and integration of the subject as well as additional information regarding matters of public interest. One takes one's existential experience as data.

I am asked how is it that one travels from knowledge of the individual apparently idiosyncratic self to knowledge of the general? The relation between the individual and the universal exists although I cannot claim to understand it satisfactorily. I do know that as I travel inward, I tend to be freed from it, and hence more sensitive and receptive to what is external. It is as if because I can see more of myself in its multi-dimensional manifestations, I am also able to see more of others. It is as if after one travels for a certain distance in the realm of the idiosyncratic, one gets to the roots of that realm, and these roots become what is collective. That is, while these roots are apparently common to us all, they are manifested idiosyncratically.

Thus we find what we can call for now "thematic variation" in individual biographies, but holding (as it were) these variegated contents is what we can call a common structure. For example, we know that each of us has a past, a present, and a future not yet lived. We find, however bizarre it may seem, that, in effect, the three exist co-extensively, and that one can enter say the past if conditions are proper. While we find the contents of biographic pasts and imagined futures vary, the structure of their relation to the present, the complex manner in which they distort the present, is very similar.

I find that by entering the past and the future, by describing them and interpreting them, and I can more closely differentiate the three from each other, and so I am better able to look at the present with less chance of superimposition of past and future. By consciously using interpretative systems like psychoanalysis and consciously lying them aside and working to speak in my voice about what I take to be my present, I am able, and this image seems to fit, to descend deeper in what constitutes the present. I find that I am facing some issue, that is, that the present situation is meaningful, that some response is proper if I am to understand it, and move past it, and remain in it.

So that I discern that the theme of my current situation differs from, say, yours, but the fact that we are both facing an issue is the same. The fact that this situation can be unraveled is the same. The fact that our academic studies

make and do not make contributions, corceptual and otherwise, to our understanding of our present and the determination of the future is the same. The fact that our private lives influence our work is the same.

So very broadly speaking, we can do two things: we can tell stories about our experience. From a different point of reference, then, I glimpse part of the significance of imaginative literature, of poetry, novels and so on.

Second, we can try to generalize on the basis of the stories we tell and the ones we hear others tell, taking them as evidence of a sort, and attempt to formulate in general terms the broad outlines of past, present and future, the nature of our experience, and specially our educational experience, that is the way we can understand our present in the way that allows us to move on, more learned, more evolved than before. Perhaps then we can grasp again the significance of academic studies and the potential contributions they can make to our life time. This concern for common law is related I think to a basic idea of science.

The integration of these two primorial impulses (these impulses which, in their estrangement have become 'two cultures') is the next historical, evolutionary step. However modest it may seem, this step can begin to be taken I think in one's individual self, and in the analysis of one's educational experience.

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